

Supervisor's Report

Michaela Raisová, "The Past As a Leitmotif in Stewart Parker's Dramatic Work for the Stage" (MA Thesis)

Michaela Raisová's thesis examines the use of history in what is almost the entire corpus of Stewart Parker's stage plays. Despite the fact that the topic has been previously treated in a number of articles, it has still sufficient potential for innovative work. The candidate makes an attempt in the introductory chapter to employ the ideas of Hayden White as a critical framework to be used in her examination of the variegated ways in which Parker's work approaches the past. While her summary of White's views is apt, the candidate regrettably never refers to his work in the body of her thesis. This is clearly a missed opportunity, since White's comments on different ways of emplotment in historiography in particular could have served as inspiration for a consideration of how historical narrative is emplotted in Parker's plays (the candidate tries to sketch out such an analysis in her conclusion, where her remarks lack any connection with the main body of the text, quite apart from necessarily coming across as simplistic). Moreover, it is perhaps due to the lack of practical consideration that is given to the theoretical context that the terms "the past" and "history" are used rather vaguely: one sometimes wonders about which past, or whose history is discussed at a particular point, and whether these are mutually commensurable (the colonial history of Ireland vs. the events immediately preceding in the life of a character, for instance).

The chief strength of the candidate's work consist in intelligent and detailed close reading of the individual plays. The interpretation is lucid, coherent, and based on an appropriate use of the most relevant secondary sources concerned with the playwright's work. Furthermore, it consistently highlights the ethical aspects of Parker's work. It is only the juxtaposition of *Catchpenny Twist* with the TV series *Lost Belongings* that appears to be somewhat random.

There are several questions/issues that I would like to raise for the defence of the thesis:

1. The discussion of *Nightshade* is clearly among the most accomplished parts of the thesis. However, the central role of magic in the play is hardly discussed.
2. Given the concerns of most of Parker's work: is it perhaps feasible to view the central contrast between misguided belief and the hard facts in *Pratt's Fall* in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland? Moreover, the candidate may consider a comparison of the play with Brian Friel's *Translations*, a seminal drama concerned both with the Irish past and contemporaneous Northern Ireland, that also uses the trope of map-making (*Translations* was premiered by Field Day three years previous to *Pratt's Fall*).

The overall argument is marred by rather frequent language mistakes (wrong use of prepositions and articles, and occasionally odd word choice) and errors of formatting.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "very good" or "good", based on the result of the defence.

Prague, 6 September 2011

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD